



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

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ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

PART I. PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

1. Project Title: Great Falls Shooting Sports Complex (GFSSC) 300 Yard Range Improvement Project

2. Type of Proposed Action:

Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP) proposes to provide partial funding to the Great Falls Shooting Sports Complex, Inc. for improvements to the 300 yard range. This project is designed to re-grade the steep angled floor of the 300 yard range to correct past erosion problems. To accomplish this, the floor of the range will be “stepped” in 100 yard increments. The re-adjusted range layout will also require moving the firing line about 10 yards to the south as only 4 benches line up with each target backer at all distances. Construction of concrete walk-ways and two concrete shooting pads along with a road to the target backers, are designed to improve handicapped accessibility.

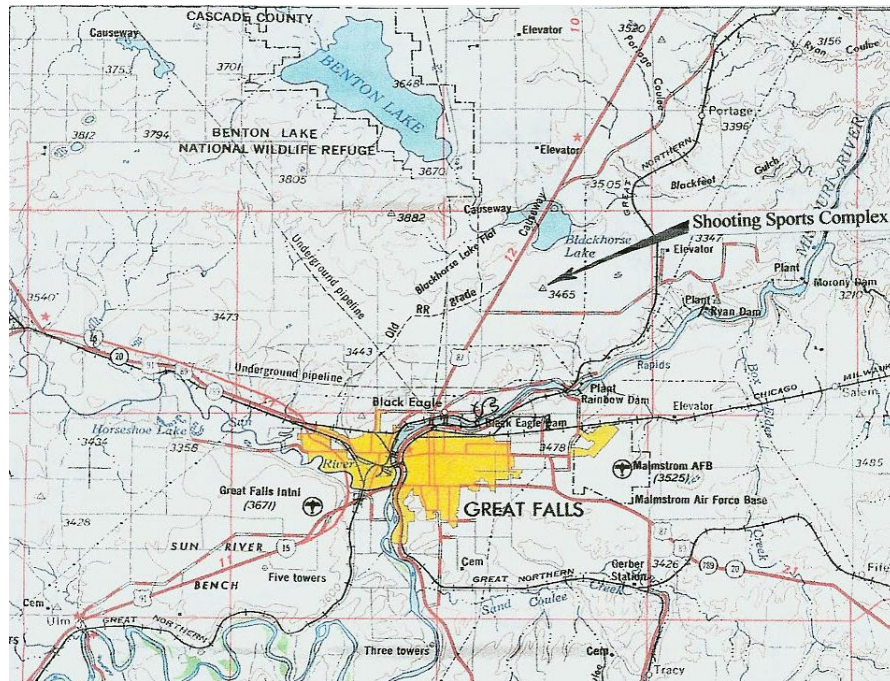
3. Location Affected by Proposed Action: The Shooting Sports Complex is three miles north of Great Falls, Montana. (See map 1), Range complex is approximately 942.37 acres off of Ryan Dam Road. Formerly the Beckman property with Black Horse Butte on north edge of the property, but known locally as Radio Tower Hill from the microwave relay towers on top. Of the 942.37 acres, 582.37 are owned by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) and the remaining 360 acres is owned by GFSSC (see map 2).

FWP: Township 21 North, Range 4 East, M.P.M.

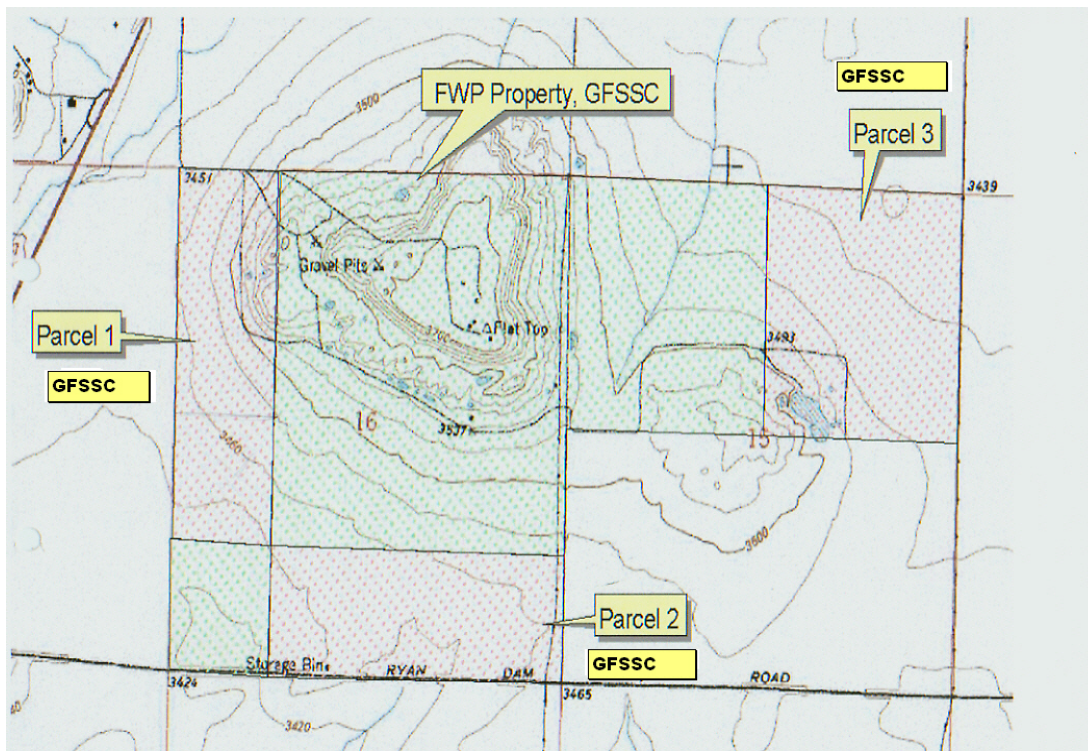
Section 15: NW $\frac{1}{4}$; Section 16: NE $\frac{1}{4}$, E $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$, N $\frac{1}{2}$ S $\frac{1}{2}$, SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$

GFSSC: Township 21 North, Range 4 East, M.P.M.

Section 15: NE $\frac{1}{4}$; Section 16: SE $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$, S $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$, W $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$



Map 1 – Area Map showing GFSSC location.



Map 2 – Black Horse Butte showing land ownership between FWP & GFSSC.

4. Agency Authority for the Proposed Action: MCA87-1-276 through 87-1-279 (Legislative established policies and procedures for the establishment and improvement of shooting ranges) MCA87-2-105 (Departmental authority to expend funds to provide training in the safe handling and use of firearms and safe hunting practices). The Montana Legislature has authorized funding for the establishment of a Shooting Range Development Program providing financial assistance for the development of shooting ranges. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks has responsibility for the administration of the program, including the necessary guidelines and procedures governing GFSSC EA

applications for funding assistance under the program.

FWP often receives comments directed at the department's legal authority to grant funds to be used by private shooting clubs for shooting range construction. Below is language found in MCA 87-1-277 that gives FWP this authority:

To be eligible for grant assistance, a private shooting club or a private organization:

- (a)(i) shall accept in its membership any person who holds or is eligible to hold a Montana hunting license and who pays club or organization membership fees;*
 - (ii) may not limit the number of members;*
 - (iii) may charge a membership fee not greater than the per-member share of the club's or organization's reasonable cost of provision of services, including establishment, improvement, and maintenance of shooting facilities and other membership services; and*
 - (iv) shall offer members occasional guest privileges at no cost to the member or invited guest and shall make a reasonable effort to hold a public sight-in day each September, when the general public may use the shooting range for a day-use fee or at no cost; or*
- (b) shall admit the general public for a reasonable day-use fee.*

5. Need for the Action(s): Erosion has been a problem on the 300 yard range, there is no road access to target backers, some berms need to be "heightened" to correct potential safety problems, handicapped access on the firing line needs improvement and the road needs to be extended to parking area.

6. Objectives for the Action(s): To reduce erosion on the 300 yard rifle range and to provide handicapped access to the firing line and target backers and to create a safer range by raising the "heights" of berms.



Figure 1 - 300 Yard Range looking north towards Black Horse Butte. Steep angle of range floor and erosion can be seen on the floor and side berms.



Figure 2- 300 Yard Range looking south from the top of Black Horse Butte.

7. Project Size: Estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected:

The proposed improvements will be safely spread within a three acre area on the leased properties and contained on the 300 yard range and parking lot (see Figure 1).

8. Affected Environment

The surrounding area and most of range is or was formerly agricultural primarily used for dry land farming. Currently 278.07 acres of the GFSSC properties are characterized as too saline or too steep to farm. The GFSSC is surrounded by one farm operation. There are no delineated wetlands, nor natural water sources within the area proposed for development, but the range complex did contain 3 older man made reservoirs and other “wet” areas that occasionally contain water from snow melt.

9. Description of Project: The original 300 yard range, on the south side of the Butte (see Figures 2 & 3), was completed in November 2004. This project is to re-grade the 300 yard range floor to limit erosion. To accomplish this, the floor of range will be “stepped” in 100 yard increments. Stepping the range floor will allow all benches to fire safely at 100 yd., 200 yd., and 300 yd. targets while decreasing the steep angle. This requires relocation of approximately 7,500 yards of dirt. This dirt will be used to increase the side berm “heights”, and to build an access road to the target backers. Re-adjusted range layout will also require moving the firing line about 10 yards to the South, as currently only 4 benches line up with each target backer at all distances. Concrete access ways will be provided to two concrete shooting pads for handicapped accessibility. Both the road and parking area are to be graveled. All disturbed areas will be reseeded within the guidelines of the Department of Environmental Quality’s Storm Water permitting requirements. In Accordance With (IAW) contracts agreements with Fish, Wildlife & Parks, and all projects are to be completed by June 30, 2010.

10. List any Other Local, State, or Federal Agency that has Overlapping or Additional

Jurisdiction:**Permits, Licenses and/or Authorizations:**

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Permit</u>
Storm Water Permit	Montana Dept. of Environmental Quality

Funding:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Funding Amount</u>
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks	\$13,500

11. Affiliations, Cooperating Agencies, User Groups and/or Supporting Groups: (See previously tiered EAs from 2005 and 2007)

Sportsmen Clubs: Safari Club, National Rifle Association, Montana Wildlife Federation, Mule Deer Foundation, Pheasants Forever, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, National Wild Turkey Federation, Ducks Unlimited, Walleye's Unlimited.

Shooting Sports: Missouri River Shooters, Sun River Skeet Club, Russell Country Sportsmen, Russell Country Sportsmen, Ed McGiveran Pistol Club, Montana Plainsman Black Powder Club.

Government/Corporate Sponsors: PPL Montana, Cascade County, City of Great Falls, Three Rivers Communication

Law Enforcement: Great Falls City Police, Montana Highway Patrol, US Border Patrol, Montana CIB, Montana Probation & Parole, Malmstrom AFB Security Force, Montana Law Enforcement Academy, Cascade County Sheriff, FWP Law Enforcement, US Marshall Service, FBI, US Customs, US Fish & Wildlife Service, BIA Youth Education: 4H Shooting Program, Olympic Shooting Program, FWP Hunter Safety Program.

Fish Wildlife & Parks as owner of the majority of the property leased to a Board of Directors of the Great Falls Shooting Sports Complex, Inc.

12. History of the Planning and Scoping Process, and Any Public Involvement: This proposed project and some member concerns were discussed and mitigated at the Board of Director's meeting, on December 1, 2009. The GFSSC Board of Director's meetings are open to the GFSSC membership and the public. These meeting are the first Tuesday of every month, with a general membership meeting on the first Tuesday of January. This project and other proposals and photographs can be accessed on the GFSSC website where meeting minutes, newsletters, range schedules and other items of interest are posted for public viewing.

13. List of Agencies Consulted/Contacted During Preparation of the EA:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Region 4, Great Falls

John Sprague, 3128 Wells Fargo Dr., Great Falls, MT 59404

14. Name, Address and Phone Number of Project Sponsor:

John Sprague, 3128 Wells Fargo Dr., Great Falls, MT 59404, 868-6635

grizzsprague@yahoo.com ; GFSSC web site <http://gfssc.net/phpwebsite/index.php>

15. Other Pertinent Information: Previous EAs have been completed in 2001 (Acquisition of a Community Shooting Range), 2005 (Shooting Range Complex Plan and Construction) and 2007

(Continuation of Shooting Range Complex Plan) for the Great Falls Shooting Sports Complex.

Shooting range applications require the participant's governing body to approve by resolution its submission of applications for shooting range funding assistance. Resolution Date: April 27, 2009

16. Identification of the Preferred Alternatives:

The proposed alternative A, alternative B and the no action alternative were considered.

- **Alternative A (Proposed Alternative)** is as described in Part I paragraph 10 (Description of Project) to reduce erosion on 300 yard range, improve berm heights and provide a new target backer access road.
- **Alternative B (No Action Alternative)** Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Shooting Sports Grant money would be denied and the area will remain an active shooting complex without additional erosion control, access road, and improved berms.

There were no other alternatives that were deemed reasonably available, nor prudent.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Abbreviated Checklist – The degree and intensity determines extent of Environmental Review. An abbreviated checklist may be used for those projects that are not complex, controversial, or are not in environmental sensitive areas)

Table 1. Potential impact on physical environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Below
1. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources				X		
2. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats				X		#2
3. Introduction of new species into an area				X		
4. Vegetation cover, quantity & quality				X		#4
5. Water quality, quantity & distribution (surface or groundwater)				X		#5
6. Existing water right or reservation				X		
7. Geology & soil quality,				X		#7

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Below
stability & moisture						
8. Air quality or objectionable odors				X		#8
9. Historical & archaeological sites				X		#9
10. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
11. Aesthetics				X		

Comments

2. & 5. There are no delineated wetlands and no natural water sources within the area proposed for development. There are 24 old reservoirs or waterholes in the area which were identified during the February 2007 Cultural Resources Inventory. During the surveys of August 2005 there was no water found in any of these sites and only wet mud and a small puddle in the largest “pond” east of the bentonite hill. The three “wetter” reservoirs are located in the area of the bentonite hill, and on the north side of Black Horse Butte and southeast side of Black Horse Butte along the access road. Two of these are on FWP property and the largest pond is on GFSSC property. These three man-made reservoirs have some water for most of the wet years and all three had water during this July 2007 survey. The larger pond area, northeast of the bentonite hill, is designated as the future dog training area. There are no plans to eliminate, nor materially alter any of these ponds in the future. The other “so-called” water holes identified during the cultural inventory are ephemeral and only occasionally collect rain or snowmelt, and none of these are permanent surface water sources. There was no water found in any of these areas during the surveys of August 2005, nor again in July 2007. The majority of these “wetter” sites are on the GFSSC property and outside of the future proposals for development on the range. The primary aquifer is approximately 500 feet beneath the surface with minimal risk of pollution.

4. The elimination of vegetation for the implementation of the proposed action will not change the overall abundance and diversity of plant species within the area. The proposed projects occupy a very small portion of the individual properties and native vegetation is minimally present anywhere on the property. Therefore it is determined to have an insignificant impact on native vegetation in the area.

7. The project will cause limited displacement of soils but these improvements and construction will not substantially effect geological features or establish new erosion patterns. Soil disruption for this site is localized. Erosion control measures are in effect and disturbed areas are to be reseeded. Reseeding will be with native short-grass prairie & CRP species with some alfalfa added for soil improvement.

8. Minor and temporary dust and vehicle emissions would be created by construction equipment during the proposed improvements within this project area. However the construction time is short and human effects will be limited due to the sparse population in the surrounding area.

9. A cultural resources inventory on 582.37 acres of the complex was conducted in November 2005. That inventory discovered five cultural sites and three isolated finds. None of these sites or isolated finds are in the proposed project area.

Table 2. Potential impacts on human environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Below
1. Social structures and cultural diversity				X		
2. Changes in existing public benefits provided by wildlife populations and/or habitat				X		
3. Local and state tax base and tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural production				X		#4
5. Human health				X		#5
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal income				X		
7. Access to & quality of recreational activities				X		#7
8. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals (ordinances)				X		
9. Distribution & density of population and housing				X		#9
10. Demands for government services				X		
11. Industrial and/or commercial activity				X		

Comments

4. The site is adjacent to surrounding agricultural land. Agricultural leases are being pursued to continue dry land farming on portions of the property. Currently 278.07 acres of the property are characterized as too saline or too steep to farm.

5. Range site plans, construction and the ongoing operational and maintenance plans meet the industry's standards of safety for the range participants and the public at large.

7. Range complex will provide year round controlled access and fulfills a need for a range to accommodate law enforcement training, hunter education, and public shooting. Individual public shooting opportunities are provided two days per month on the public range from April through September, and also additional public "site-in" opportunities before big game season. Additional range time may be provided for individual groups and organizations upon request. A schedule of range times and availability can be found on the GFSSC website at www.GFSSC.net.

9. This is a rural area with a low population density. The GFSSC site is completely surrounded by one farm operation. The nearest other neighbor is over 1/3 mile on the NW corner on opposite side of the butte.

PART III. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Does the proposed action involve potential risks or adverse effects which are uncertain but extremely harmful if they were to occur? NO

Does the proposed action have impacts that are individually minor, but cumulatively significant or potentially significant? Recommendation and justification concerning preparation of EIS. This proposed action has no impacts that are individually minor, but cumulatively significant or potentially significant. Cumulative impacts have been assessed considering any incremental impact of the proposed action when they are combined with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, and no significant impacts or substantially controversial issues were found. There are no extreme hazards created with this project and there are no conflicts with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan.

Neither the proposed alternative (A) nor the no action alternative (B) would have any significant negative environmental or potentially negative consequences.

- There are beneficial consequences to Acceptance of the **Proposed Alternative (A)** increasing shooting sports opportunities in the Great Falls area by reducing erosion on 300 yard range, improving berms, and providing a target backer access road.
- The **No Action Alternative (B)** would be to not provide additional erosion control, improved berms, or a new target backer access road, but to continue on with shooting activities on the 300 yard range without proposed improvements. Land use would remain the same. Therefore the proposed alternative is the prudent alternative.

List and explain proposed mitigative measures (stipulations):

NONE

PART IV. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

All of the pertinent or potential impacts of the project have been reviewed, discussed, and analyzed. None of the project reviewed were complex, controversial, or located in an environmentally sensitive area. The projects being proposed are on properties owned by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. The low impact activities proposed, and the increased recreational opportunity, all indicate that this should be considered the final version of the environmental assessment. There are no significant environmental or economic impacts associated with the proposed alternative (A). The Great Falls Shooting Sports Complex's proposed alternative, to provide a safe regulated shooting opportunity is supported by its members and the public. Therefore, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks should approve the proposed alternative (A) for the expansion proposals outlined in Part I paragraphs 2 & 10.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT:

Describe public involvement:

Announcement for EA comment will be published in the Great Falls Tribune on February 4th. Additionally the EA will be available for review on the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks website on February 1, 2010.

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Amended by FWP on February 1, 2010